

Communities of Practice: Facilitating Seamless Systems of Transition: A Unified Approach

Toolkit to Build, Expand & Sustain Transition Collaboratives
2011 Arizona Transition Conference
October 2011

Joan Kester
The George Washington University



1

Focus of Session

The transition of youth with disabilities is a complex maze, requiring coordination of multiple partners and service delivery systems. This is coupled with increasing demands, higher levels of accountability, and decrease in resources available to transition partners to support youth in their transition to adult life. Communities of practice (CoPs) provide a framework to facilitate seamless systems of transition through a unified approach.



2

Focus of Session

Systems approach

- *Communities of Practice*
 - NOT a *new* initiative, but a **strategy** to create collective learning opportunities and to improve practice

Shift in worldview

- *Appreciative Inquiry*
 - NOT deficit thinking, but **opportunity thinking**



3

Collective Learning is Needed

Communities of Practice (CoPs) provide such a framework for diverse stakeholders to deepen their knowledge and expertise and identify creative employment strategies. CoPs have made documented improvements in a variety of corporate and governmental fields, and provide a framework to address the complex needs of adults with autism seeking employment.



4

Employment Collaborative Toolkit

Research Brief: Communities of Practice
Building & Expanding Community: What Teams Exist Now?
Building Community: Who Can Contribute to Outcomes of Youth?
Community Roster: A Living List
Invitation to the Collaborative Kick-off
Collaborative: Kick-Off Agenda
Collaborative: Planning Framework
Collaborative: Communication Tools



5

Communities of Practice

A Brief Primer



6

Something new?

Snyder and Wenger (2004) argue that CoP have existed and evolved since Homo sapiens evolved 50,000 years ago. In ancient times, CoP formed in classical Greece through corporations of metalworkers, potters, masons, and other craftsmen had both a social purpose and a business function.



7

What are Communities of Practice?

Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4).



8

How is knowledge created to solve complex issues?

Learning emerges out of people making sense of situations; knowledge is created through this social interaction to the benefit of the individual, group, and organization. A key context which promotes learning and knowledge creation is communities of practice (CoP).



9

Steps to Forming a CoP

- Identify domain (focus of group)
- Identify current teams where you can expand/connect your work
- Identify potential community members (everyone who may share the passion)
- Design invitation for folks – be inclusive, not exclusive. Throughout process always ask who isn't there and needs to be invited into the work.
- Establish agenda --discuss what's working, what are issues, potential resources, selection of a priority and plan for the group to work on together.



10

Steps to Forming a CoP

- Leadership is distributed – identify potential community members with expertise in areas
- Identify means and rhythm of communication
- Set easy target or project first – early wins help!
- No pre-set agendas – everyone is an expert, no pre-planned activities, must be owned by group



11

Formation of CoP

- Set up ongoing communication
- Share tools & resources
- Showcase effective practices & strategies
- Create an open environment for ongoing learning
- Celebrate successes



12

Shared Leadership

An Essential Element



13

Leadership means many things...

We each have our own perception of what leadership means.

Leadership can be:

- Traits
- Behaviors
- Skills

Formal and informal

Transformational and transactional

Changes in different situations



14

Leadership Activity

What are key phrases that come to mind when you describe leadership in transition?



15

Shared Leadership: Leadership is a Choice

Denise Bissonnette and Diversity World

"We always get to choose the level of initiative with which we will respond to the questions that arise in any given situation."



16

Transition Leaders

Considering all of the partners involved in the transition of youth with disabilities, what roles do the leaders hold in your transition efforts?



17

Leadership Comes in Many Forms

- What leadership roles exist in helping youth transition from school to adult life?
- How can you promote shared leadership in your local efforts?



18

Building & Expanding Community

What Teams Exist Now?



19

What Teams Exist Now?

What teams, workgroups, & councils currently exist in your community that contribute to successful post-school outcomes of youth?

Identify the groups, sponsors, & purpose...determine how you can connect...



20

Connecting Your Work

When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge... Mapping out existing transition teams, workgroups & councils is an important first step to building and expanding your transition community. Otherwise, by starting a "new" collaborative, you are contributing to the fragmentation of the service delivery system...What are the common purposes – how can you build upon and connect the work of existing teams?



21

Building Community

Who Can Contribute to the Work



22

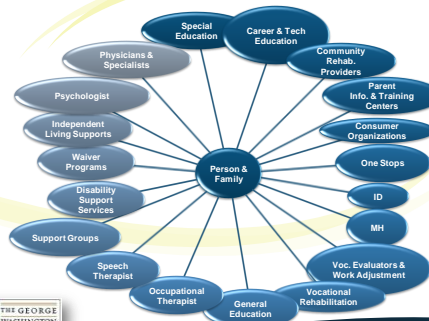
Community Partners

Many people, government agencies, and organizations have distinct interest, roles and responsibilities in ensuring the successful employment of individuals with ASD.



23

Potential Community Members



24

Planning Your Kick-Off Event

Invitation to Build/Expand Transition Collaborative



Identify Core Members

Identify several others who share your passion to act as the core group to launch the community.

Share leadership

Encourage diverse opinions



32

Invitation to the Collaborative Kick-off

You're invited to the kick-off event of...

XX Collaborative (create "identity" of community)

Purpose: To capitalize upon the knowledge and resources of a diverse group of stakeholder to develop a shared vision, identify challenges, discuss promising practices, and define future opportunities to expand and enhance employment outcomes of youth with disabilities.

If you are expanding the work of an existing group, make sure to identify the group and acknowledge their value.



33

Invitation to the Collaborative Kick-off

Invited participants: *be inclusive in the list – include organizations, roles, etc. Make sure to invite families, youth/young adults with disabilities, agencies, advocates, businesses, community members...*

Location: *identify a convenient location where many could attend. Be consideration in selection of location, so that the collaborative is not "owned" by one organization. This may be rotating locations, if it works for the community.*



34

Invitation to the Collaborative Kick-off

Time: *give plenty of notice! Identify a time you believe would be conducive to participant attendance. Schedule approximately 2 hours. To accomplish the Planning Framework, a series of meetings may be needed.*

Outcomes of the meeting: Design the future work of the Collaborative to expand and enhance collective strategies.

Please make sure to send this invitation to all those who may be interested in joining our work. Please let me know if you have any questions. Looking forward to seeing you at the meeting! *Provide contact information for the core sponsors.*



35

How would you plan a kick-off?

What factors do you need to consider in planning a kick off event?



36

Appreciative Inquiry

Foundation of the Planning Framework



Be the change you
want to see in the
world
- Gandhi



38

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

A process, philosophy, and life practice grounded in research demonstrating that focusing on what's working and aspirations for the future achieves more and does it faster and more sustainably than solving problems.



39

Change & Co-Creation



The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Peter Drucker



40

Appreciative Inquiry

Discovery for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them.

Art and practice of asking the unconditional positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential.

Instead of negation, criticism and spiralling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, design and destiny.

AI links the energy of the positive core directly to any change agenda and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.

David Cooperrider



41

Ground Rules

All ideas are valid

Everything is captured: notes/ flip charts

Listen to each other

Observe time frames

Seek common ground and action

Differences and problems are acknowledged
- but not worked on



42

What Is Appreciative Inquiry Used For?

Consult with people

Learn from past experience

Involve whole organisation or community in change

Build a vision for the future that everyone can share and help put into practice



43

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry



In every human situation something works



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

What we focus on becomes our reality



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

The language we use shapes our reality

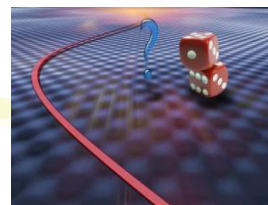
manons	chocolate filled with fresh cream (Belg.)
maquereau	mackerel
marc	grape spirit
marcassin	young wild boar
marchand de vin	wine merchant
mariné	marinated
marinière	white wine, mussel broth thickened with egg yolks
marjolaine	marjoram; layered nut cal
marrons	chestnuts



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

The act of asking questions influences the outcome in some way



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry



People have more confidence going into the future (unknown) when they carry forward parts of the present (known)



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry



If we carry parts of the past into the future, they should be what are best about the past



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

8 Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

It is important to value differences



From: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry, by Sue Annis Hammond

Deficit Focus: Consequences

Fragmentation
Few new images of possibility
Negative frames are self-fulfilling
Visionless voice leads to fatigue
'The Experts Must Know'
Weakened fabric of relationships & defensiveness leads to negative culture
Slow: puts attention on yesterday's causes



52

Problem Solving

AND

Appreciative Inquiry

Deficit Thinking

"Felt need" & identification of problem
Analysis of causes
Analysis of possible solutions
Action planning
Assumes: *Organization is a problem to be solved*
Back Door – *what's in the way of what we want?*



53

Possibility Thinking

Appreciate & value the best of *What Is*
Envision: *What Might Be*
Dialogue: *What Should Be*
Innovate: *What Will Be*
Assumes: *Organization is mystery to be discovered*
Front Door – *what is it we ultimately want?*

The Art of the Question

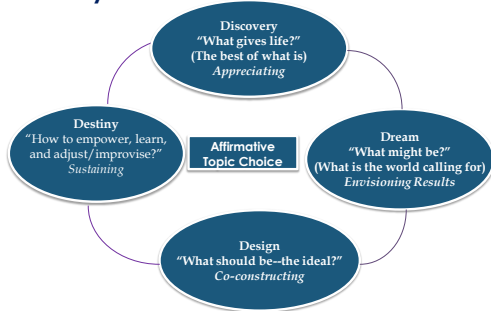
What's the biggest problem here?
Why did I have to be born in such a troubled family?
Why do you blow it so often?
Why do we still have those problems?

What possibilities exist that we have not thought about yet?
What's the smallest change that could make the biggest impact?
What solutions would have us both win?
What makes my questions inspiring, energizing, and mobilizing?

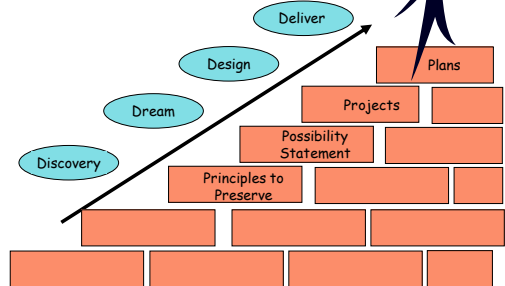


54

Appreciative Inquiry "4-D" Cycle



Solid Steps to Achieve our Goals



Discovery

"What gives life?"
(The best of what is)
Appreciating



Discovery

Appreciating and valuing the best of what is. This is also known as identifying the positive core of your work.

This phase includes clarifying those elements that you want to keep even as your organizations change in the future, as well as identifying intriguing potentials for the future.



58

Discovery Exercise: Creating Your Core

1. Describe a peak experience or "high point" in your work with your organization. What was happening? Who was involved? What made it such a powerful experience?
2. What do you most value about... yourself? your work? your organization?
3. What core factors give life to your organization?



Adapted from Cooperrider, David and Diana Whitney, "Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change"

Dream

"What might be?"
(What is the world calling for)
Envisioning Results



Dream

Envisioning "What might be".

Together you build a vision of a future they want.

You respond to their sense of what the world is calling them to become.

You imagine that the best of "what is" forms the foundation for the way things are in the future.



61

Dreaming" Exercise: Creating Our Vision

Imagine arriving at the local collaborative planning meeting in five years. Your collaborative work is recognized as outstanding in the country and is making youth with disabilities.

What does it look like? What are we achieving? What has been your role in helping us reach this point?



62

Dreaming Exercise: Possibility Statement

A **possibility statement** is a statement that bridges the best of "what is" with your own speculation or intuition of "what might be." It stretches the status quo, challenges common assumptions or routines, and helps to suggest real possibilities that represent desired possibilities for the organization and its people.



63

Dreaming Exercise: Creating Our Vision

What is your vision which can be in the form of a picture, a poem or a "Possibility Statement" that best represents your collective vision?



64

Design

"What should be - the ideal?"

Co-constructing



Design

In this phase, you determine "what should be," crafting an organization or community in which the positive core is vibrant and alive.

The design focus is placed on elements that can help bring the dreams to life, such as practices, structures, policies, technologies, etc.

The work is to develop provocative propositions (bold ideal possibilities) and principles of design that integrate the **positive core**.



66

Designing your Future Exercise

The work is to develop provocative propositions (bold ideal possibilities) and principles of design that integrate the positive core.



67

Destiny

**"How to empower, learn,
and adjust/improve?"**

Sustaining



Destiny

This final phase takes the step towards creating the initiatives, systems or changes needed to make real the future as articulated in the design propositions.

This phase can be done using Open Space to make the most of the creativity and insight of the people involved, and allowing self-selected groups to plan the next steps in the areas that they are most passionate about, and willing to take responsibility for.



69

Destiny Exercise

Based upon your bold ideal propositions, let's develop action steps for each:

- Activities
- Leaders & partnerships
- Timelines



70

Collaborative

Kick-off Agenda & Planning Framework (Appreciative Inquiry)



Kick-Off Agenda

Introduction to Communities of Practice & the Planning Framework (Based upon Appreciative Inquiry)

Facilitated Dialogue Utilizing Planning Framework

Make sure to keep a positive tone to the dialogue, focusing on what can be done rather getting lost in the challenges. Throughout the dialogue, ask if there are volunteers to lead the work.



72

Next Steps: Essential!

FIRST THREE STEPS...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

ESTABLISH PRACTICE GROUPS: (identify areas of focus, based upon dialogue; project/product focused – quick wins; identify group leaders & members; establish means of communication; schedule; report out the full-group on a schedule where full community connects). Facilitate ongoing dialogue!



73

Next Steps

Provide information about communication mechanisms (e.g. list-servs, conference call numbers, wiki address, next meeting dates; identify and invite others to join the community)



74

Recap: Steps to Forming a CoP

- Identify domain (focus of group)
- Identify current teams where you can expand/connect your work
- Identify potential community members (everyone who may share the passion)
- Design invitation for folks – be inclusive, not exclusive. Throughout process always ask who isn't there and needs to be invited into the work.
- Establish agenda --discuss what's working, what are issues, potential resources, selection of a priority and plan for the group to work on together.



75

Steps to Forming a CoP

- Leadership is distributed – identify potential community members with expertise in areas
- Identify means and rhythm of communication
- Set easy target or project first – early wins help!
- No pre-set agendas – everyone is an expert, no pre-planned activities, must be owned by group



76

Formation of CoP

- Set up ongoing communication
- Share tools & resources
- Showcase effective practices & strategies
- Create an open environment for ongoing learning
- Celebrate successes



77

Take-Aways & Questions?

- During this session you were introduced to a learning and change strategy.
- Step-by-step instruction and a toolkit were given to help you form and cultivate local collaboratives.



78

Contact Information

Joan Kester, EdDc, CRC
The George Washington University
(202) 489-7112
jkester@gwu.edu

Intellectual property of Joan Kester and
cannot be reproduced without written
authorization. Source: Exploring
Interagency Collaboration in a Secondary
Transition Community of Practice,
dissertation in progress (2011)

